

Please vote against relaxing the rules on media ownership. Some things are more important than money, and freedom of information is one of them.

"It shall be the peoples' paper, run jealously in their interest." That quote by George Winship, founder of the Grand Forks (ND) Herald, ran above the newspaper's front-page flag for more than 100 years. The Herald was, for years, the best newspaper in North Dakota, until it was purchased by Knight Ridder Corp. Now, it's a thin (VERY THIN) shadow of itself, with staff and operating cuts a constant. Coverage of the just-finished North Dakota and Minnesota Legislatures was nigh invisible, in-depth news reporting and area features are a thing of the past. Nearly all "news" in the paper comes from wire feeds. The Herald once did a stellar job of covering North Dakota and northwestern Minnesota, but constant cuts have genericized it. "It shall be the peoples' paper . . . ." has disappeared from the masthead. It is no longer the peoples' paper, nor does it belong to Grand Forks. In its quest for profit, Knight-Ridder has ruined it.

The same thing happened to our local television stations when they were merged with Fargo TV. Coverage of our local area is nearly non-existent, because the news editors will seldom send a camera "north." And our radio stations, which once had a variety of news broadcasts, are now owned by one entity, with the same news broadcast on every station.

Please do not relax the rules regarding media ownership. The current rules already allow near monopolies, and this would take it to an unprecedented level. A democratic society depends on diverse news coverage. Allowing huge conglomerates to own multiple news outlets will harm our democracy. Bigger is NOT always better.

Thank you.